



James Aronson

Murdoch gobbles Felker. From the belly he cries "I shall return"

The staffs of publications involved in the recent newspaper/magazine cold war in New York seem strangely dismayed that publishers behave like capitalists in a capitalist world. This reaction must have saddened Rupert Murdoch who, according to the rules of the free enterprise game, behaved impeccably in acquiring the *New York Post*, *New York* magazine, the *Village Voice*, and *New West* in Los Angeles. Their dismay at this normal behavior detracts nothing from the decent instincts of the men and women who walked off the job in support of displaced publisher Clay Felker (only to watch him scurry back in as a virtual scab in order to get out an issue of *New York*); but it does suggest that a course in Marxism would be instructive. It could be sweetened by calling it Imperial Journalism A.

The chain of events began in 1970 when Ed Fancher and Dan Wolf, publishers of the *Voice*, having grown wealthy on the fat advertising and lean plantation wages paid to their editorial slaves, sold a large hunk of stock to Carter Burden (Vanderbilt money) and his friend Bartle Bull. Burden and Bull (it's impossible to invent names more appropriate to the situation) in turn hitched their portfolio to Felker's swinging *New York* in 1974, and the whole cast took off in search of the hot-test pastrami in town.

There was consternation at the *Voice*

at the Felker take-over, and photos of Felker assuring the staff, from the top of a desk, of his devotion to the indistinct principles of the *Voice*. The incipient revolt was quelled by shelling out, in a shrinking job market, relatively good wages. The *Voice* settled into a prophetic semi-Murdochian sensationalism ("I Was the Dyke at My High School Reunion") with a spruced-up format.

►The invasion of the body snatcher.

Enter the Man from Down Under. Murdoch was being courted by Felker for some cash to help ease the losses incurred by the publication of *New West*. In the course of things, Felker introduced the Australian to Dorothy Schiff, known to be looking for a purchaser for the *Post*. It was the beginning and the end of the affair. Rupert waltzed Dolly right out of the publisher's chair for \$31 million. Not even Matilda ever got such a quick whirl.

The doomsayers gathered in the garment district with dire predictions. But it is difficult to say that Rupert will put out a worse paper than Dolly. When her fling with sex and social democracy petered out at the newsstands, she dug into the afternoon market with a monopoly of syndicated senility. It would be a considerable accomplishment to bottom William F. Buckley's snottiness and Max Lerner's pecksniffery.

Having done with Dolly, Murdoch then moved in on Felker at *New York* and the *Voice*. There were acrimonious all-night sessions in the board rooms, flights to the slopes of Aspen (Burden & Bull again) and more desk-top oratory by Felker. All to no avail. Into the sunset went Felker, weighted down with bags of Commonwealth bullion, alternating cries of "Rape!" with "I shall return."

The singles bars are still agog with excitement over the rapid-fire events. Some staff members of *New York* have departed, muttering about alien ownership of American property. A worry indeed, but perhaps parochial in light of the increasing American stranglehold on global communications (about which more in a future commentary).

Of immediate concern should be the galloping pace of monopoly ownership of the American media by an ever-narrowing collection of native conglomerates. The Murdoch venture pales in comparison. For example, in 1974 the Knight newspapers purchased the Ridder chain for \$99 million, making a combine of 35 newspapers. Last November, S.I. Newhouse acquired eight Michigan dailies (and the Sunday supplement *Parade*) for \$305 million. For Newhouse that totals 30 daily newspapers, five magazines, six television stations, four radio stations and 20 cable television systems. He out-

bid the Times-Mirror Corporation of Los Angeles, just as Murdoch outbid Katherine Graham of the *Washington Post* for the Felker trio.

Next time you hear a mournful tale of the shrinking American newspaper industry, shed not even one crocodile tear. Profits in the industry in the first half of 1976 rode toward record highs—up 6 to 79 percent for 13 of 14 publicly-held companies (as reported by Colin, Hochstin Co.) and on average double the profit margin for American corporations generally. Six-month advertising totals were \$2.63 billion.

The automated American newspaper industry, having beaten or broken almost every union in the field, has finally entered the age of automated profits. In this situation it feels no compunction to maintain even a vestige of its barely existent adversarial role. The most constructive thing you can do to counter its influence is to get four friends a week to subscribe to *In These Times*.

Note: In the last commentary I gave Jules Witcover back to the Los Angeles Times. He is now on the staff of the Washington Post.

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Alan Wolfe

The CIA comes back fighting, has Carter on the defensive

Theodore Sorensen will not head the Central Intelligence Agency in part because he let the public in on some secrets and in part because he was at one time a pacifist. Griffin Bell will head the Department of Justice, even though he has been both a racist and a mediocre judge. Therein lies a tale about standards of political morality in post-Watergate America. But there is another tale to be told first. It is a tale of the incredible resurgence of the CIA. From a point at which it looked as if the Agency might actually be broken up, the CIA has reestablished its hegemony decisively, and the offing of Sorensen is only one step in the revitalization of an agency that was recently on the rocks.

The drama of the Sorensen withdrawal was not feigned. We do not know now—and may never know—what dirty line the CIA handed to Sorensen in order to get him to back out, but it must have been stunning. In any case, their blackmail is beside the point. The important question is why the CIA resisted Sorensen, and the reason must lie in a sharp but secret battle somewhere within the nether regions of state power.

►Split on the CIA.

Ever since the failure of the Bay of Pigs project there has been a split in the American ruling class about how to handle espionage. One side is represented by Wall Street capital and its intellectual allies in academia. It argues that there is a danger that the CIA will become too irresponsible if its affairs are too secret. To carry out a foreign policy in the long-run interests of businessmen as a class, the machinery of state must be rationalized

and brought under the control of "responsible" leaders—i.e., the President. Vigilantism and flagrant episodes are not effective weapons of foreign policy, and besides, they only make politicians seem more illegitimate when the details find their way to the public. Beginning with Kennedy's appointment of his brother and Maxwell Taylor to examine the CIA and continuing down to Carter's appointment of Sorensen—who was Kennedy's greatest flatterer and who was recommended by Kennedy in-house intellectual Richard Neustadt—this perspective has sought to bring the agency under the control of the President, especially when the President is a Democrat.

But the CIA itself has a different view. Its self-conception is that intelligence can only be effective if spies, like businessmen of another era, are given a free hand to operate. By now firmly entrenched in the bureaucracy, CIA types have built alliances with conservatives in the Republican party and with defense industries. They have persistently refused to be "reformed" and have gone about their business protecting specific American capitalists in specific situations, irrespective of what effect these actions may have on long-range foreign policy interest. (These everyday services, which the CIA provides to specific corporations, the bulk of its activity, are illustrated in Philip Agee's *Inside the Company*). CIA operatives have indeed become, as one Kennedy aide once charged, a state-within-the-state, responsible to no one but themselves.

►Uneasy harmony.

For most of the postwar period these two

perspectives on the CIA coexisted in an uneasy harmony. So long as the covert operations did not blatantly contradict democratic rhetoric, liberal theoreticians and policy makers could live with them. Conversely, so long as the liberal reformers did not make a major effort to transform the agency, the spooks could live with a bit of public criticism. But the harmony, the past 10 years, has become discordant, and both the Sorensen nomination and its rejection must be understood as part of the unhinging of this tenuous coalition.

The first part to break occurred when the covert operations actually began to pose a serious problem of legitimacy. Watergate revealed that the CIA had become inextricably linked to domestic policies. Revelations by the *New York Times* began to document how extensive CIA intervention into domestic affairs had become. Vietnam indicated that the CIA was not always right, and even when it was, that policy makers could ignore its estimates. Former agents suddenly began to write books about the agency's practices. A watchdog organization was set up in Washington to monitor its affairs. Foreign organizations began to publicize the identity of local agents, with predictable consequences. The position of director had become a revolving door, indicating clearly that the agency had become politicized. In short, the cold war consensus that protected the CIA from any public examination had collapsed under the burden of its own past.

►The Agency strikes back.

At the same time—and on this point we

can only guess—public scrutiny began to interfere with Agency operations. At some point a decision must have been made to fight back. The counterattack came during the Church Committee investigation. Instead of monitoring the CIA, the Church Committee began to monitor the criticism of it. Statements were issued through Church's office that intelligence was basic to American security, and that only flagrant abuses would be publicized. Somehow the CIA had gotten to Church. Maybe they reminded him that an East German book called *Who's Who in the CIA* listed Church as a former spy. Maybe they convinced Northwest businessmen to curb Church, as has been widely rumored in Washington. In any case, the expected onslaught on the CIA never took place.

Carter therefore inherits an Agency outside his control. His goal will be to "manage" the CIA by bringing it as much as possible within his supervision. The appointment of a liberal like Sorensen was instrumental to this end. This the CIA understood as well as Carter and it went to work. Most likely, however, Sorensen's withdrawal does not end the struggle. Carter will likely make one more attempt to nominate a "reformer" to head the Agency and the dance will start again. And even if Carter comes up with a cleaner record on the part of his next nominee, the CIA will not stop in its attacks. We are clearly in for a major struggle over the future of the CIA. How predictable that the whole affair will take place out of our sight.

Alan Wolfe lives in Berkeley, Calif., and is the author of *The Seamy Side of Democracy* (McKay).

IN THESE TIMES

Editorial

A good enough ocean with plenty of fish

Letters from readers have raised two important questions about our advocacy of electoral politics. First, whether electoral politics is appropriate activity at all for socialists; and second, even if it is, whether they should make electoral activity a top priority now when, according to them, the working class is not ready to receive favorably socialist views but must first be prepared by participation in other struggles.

The major popular movements in the United States today do not view electoral politics and other activity as mutually exclusive, but understand that both are integral to their over-all political strategy. It is largely avowed socialist or revolutionary organizations in the U.S. that insist upon an either/or dichotomy. Elsewhere throughout the capitalist world, socialist and marxist parties with any significant following engage in electoral politics wherever and whenever possible.

Aversion to electoral politics among American leftists has less to do with marxism or socialist theory than with their own isolation from a popular base and with the powerful syndicalist tradition rooted in typically American interest-group and business-unionist politics. It is a form of acquiescence in the depoliticization of the working class and in the much-noted "bourgeois political hegemony."

Socialist politics requires integrating interest-group and single-issue concerns into a broader class political perspective. It means bringing working people together from diverse points of struggle and translating their immediate goals into a common program that asserts working class needs as those of society as a whole.

Socialists have long been concerned with and often perplexed by the problem of bringing single-issue movements into broader coalitions. Electoral political activity is the best way to organize beyond immediate group interest and into broader class-based politics. In our view, electoral work means year-round activity, sustained organization around programs, directed beyond protest to implementing policies that people want and to the question of state power.

Those who think of this as the relatively passive action of candidates presenting a slate to people, and people casting a ballot once in a while, are as far from our concept of electoral politics as the "union-bureaucrat" or top-down controlled movements are from other leftists' view of "direct action."

►Some misunderstandings.

With these as some of our premises, we would like to clarify some misunderstandings of previous editorials.

•We do not pose electoral politics against political activity at work places, in communities, or around particular issues, interests, or grievances. Indeed, serious popular movements (black, Latino, Chicano, union, feminist, ecology, consumer, welfare rights, etc.) are oriented toward legislative and governmental programs and hence to the electoral arena. These movements are ahead of many socialists in understanding that serious politics must center on public policy and programs aimed at gaining control of state action and transforming society.

•We do not say that the legislative branches of government (local, state, and fed-

Present historical circumstances mark a new phase in American capitalist society and are strongly favorable to the rise of popular socialism.

eral) are now the people's branch. We say that socialists should organize to make them so. We believe that in engaging in electoral activity socialists should now focus on the legislative branches because they are the most accessible to popular organizing, to election victories and to establishing a socialist and anti-corporate presence in the representative bodies that can strengthen the movements against corporate power, whose citadel in the state resides in the executive branches.

•We do not see electoral politics as a mere tactic precisely because of its serious implications.

A movement in the United States that does not submit itself publicly to the judgment of the people can never hope to gain their confidence and loyalty. The progressive forces among the American people, and especially the working class, have historically rejected what appear to them to be secret or semi-secret societies, that is, organizations that do not conduct themselves publicly and subject their leaders and ideas to the people's judgment.

►Part of American life.

Consistent participation by socialists in electoral politics will help to establish socialism as part of American public life, rather than as a subterranean or esoteric force. And the experience of propagating socialism in the "American language" and fashioning their views into practical and desirable programs will enable socialists to move beyond their present isolation.

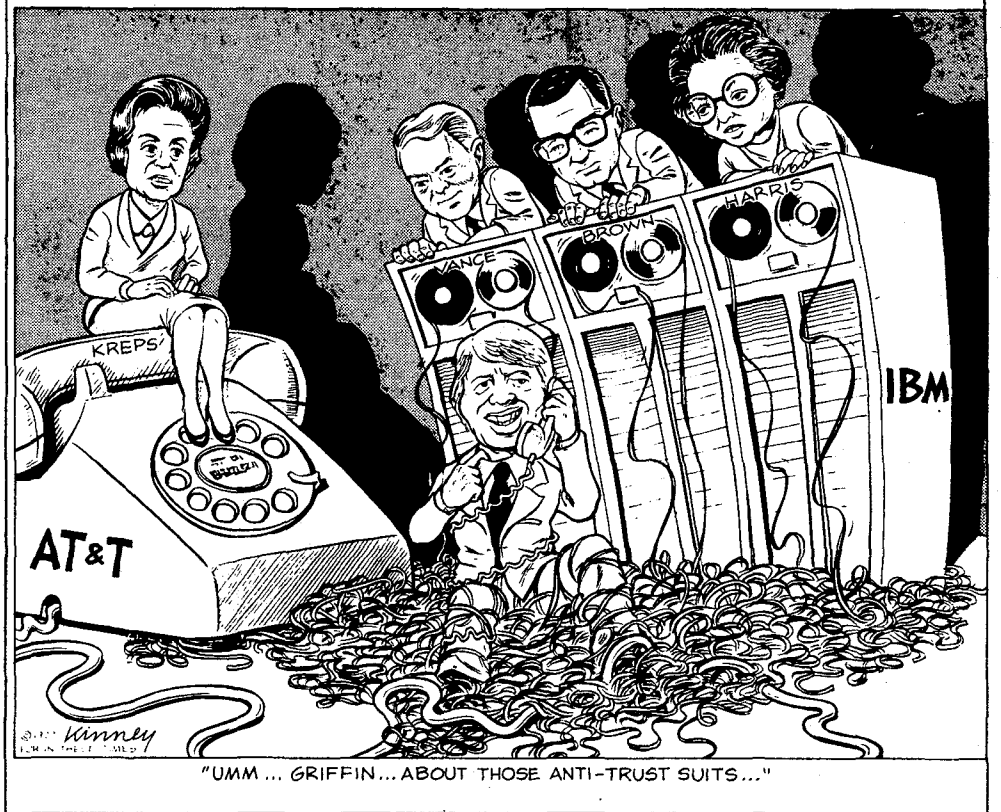
Electoral participation will also begin to habituate socialists to the democratic and popular forms of political advocacy and public intercourse that the American people demand from their political leaders. It will help guarantee that democratic values and behavior become integral to the socialist movement.

►A new phase.

Present historical circumstances, we believe, mark a new phase in American capitalist society, and are strongly favorable to the rise of popular socialism. They call for a change in socialists' understanding of the "objective conditions" and of appropriate organizational forms of struggle.

Disaffection with the corporate system is intense and growing, a culmination of the past 15 years of struggle. People are looking for alternatives that challenge corporate power not only with protests but with actionable programs looking toward different ways of organizing the economy and for political leadership responsive to the people rather than to corporate power.

Millions of Americans no longer unquestioningly grant approval to adven-



tures abroad in the name of a "crusade against communism," nor believe that Corporate America is God's gift to them or to the world.

The labor movement has made an historic departure from imperialist expansion as the way of securing jobs and living standards. Not only the labor-left but also the Meany-type leaders are opting for public planning for full employment, expansion of the public sector, opposition to corporate priorities and profits, democratic control of the investment system and redistribution of wealth, as the alternative to imperialism in protecting their constituents' everyday interests.

The black, ecology, consumer-protection, feminist, welfare-rights, and other movements all to a greater or lesser degree recognize that their own goals can not be realized short of the basic restructuring of the political-economy in opposition to corporate "growth."

All these groups are working in the electoral arena. Only professedly revolutionary socialists are holding out as if in some apocalyptic expectation.

►We don't start here.

It should be clear from all this that we do not start with the premise, stated by Roberta Lynch (*In These Times*, Jan. 19) that the American "working class ... has lost its history, its collective identity, and often the will to struggle." We do not take as a fact "that the working class in the U.S. still does not sense or act on its power as a class." That premise does accord with certain "consensus" views of American history that deny the reality of class conflict in this society, but it is not in accord with the empirical record nor is it a valid starting point for socialists.

It is true that the forms and language of American working people's struggles do not look and sound like those of other countries and times. But the particular task of socialists is to translate the movements as they do appear into their relevance to socialism and creatively to adapt their understanding of socialism to the actual developments within their own working class and in their own political culture.

The view that "objective conditions" are not "ripe," that the American working people are not "ready" for the rise of popular socialism leads directly to sectarian elitism. It is sectarian because it does not comprehend American conditions in American historical terms, and because it breeds and justifies socialists' isolation from the people. It is elitist because in effect it imagines socialists as special carriers of the Truth standing "above" and certainly apart from a benighted people.

It pictures a virtually cowardly "people" who are afraid of a word, "socialism," as a "taboo," whereas it is social-

ists with such views themselves who are afraid of the word and who make it a "taboo." They have not applied their intelligence to propagating socialism and organizing around it in popular ways and in American terms. They have not understood that socialism is not a word but an historical experience. They are afraid of being rejected by the people—and rightly so. But they project the blame for their rejection on "objective conditions," the working class, everyone but themselves.

►If we can't start now...

How much "riper" must "objective conditions" become? We have an ongoing depression with huge unemployment, world capitalism in deep crisis; a decaying major party system; corruption and scandal in low and high places reaching to the forced resignations of the vice-president and president complete with impeachment proceedings; exposures of the CIA and FBI; urban rot, collapsing social services, rising crime, unworkable schools, inadequate medical care; not to mention the Vietnam war and the profound impact of the struggles against it.

We have on the "subjective" side, massive "alienation" from the major parties and the business system, and movements by the score addressing themselves to all of these circumstances. What more are we socialists waiting for?

When not blaming "objective conditions" for their isolation, socialists blame capitalist repression. They cite "McCarthyism" of the 1940s and 1950s. That was 20 to 30 years ago. How long shall we trade on that? Bad as it was, it was child's play compared with that in other countries, then and now (think of Spain, Germany, Portugal, Brazil), yet the communist and socialist parties there learned how to maintain their class base and deal with the much more murderous repression. Do we expect our capitalist class not to act as a ruling class and not to seek to suppress socialists and propagandize in favor of capitalism?

We have to understand and propagate American socialism as highly suited to our own democratic traditions of liberty and equality, of social and cultural pluralism, of federalism, in the course of which we will be able to join the growing numbers of Americans who are coming to see that corporate capitalism is incompatible with those traditions.

The way to learn to swim is to get in the water. American electoral politics, broadly understood, is a good enough ocean with plenty of fish, some of them sharks, to put us into the swim of popular socialism. The discovery of America is not only a thing of the past. It also lies before us.